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ABSTRACT

Despite the current attention directed at rural education, rural minority youth may be in some danger of becoming invisible. A lack of specific and detailed knowledge of minority conditions and potential opportunities at regional, sub-regional, state, and local levels has inhibited the development of sound programs and policies for the redress of educational and other social ills of rural minority youth. While nationally comprising only 11% of the total rural youth under 25 years of age in 1970, minority populations were very substantial in certain geographic areas. In the South, 21% of rural youth were Black: and in the West, 12 1/2% were Hispanic and 5% were American Indian. Rural educators and rural education researchers should begin to focus attention on rural minorities and encourage minority participation in such endeavors. National policies should take into account the special rural conditions of: an undifferentiated economic structure, a limited number of institutions, a small or sparse population, and the fact of rural isolation. Incentives should be provided to encourage rural private-public sector collaboration. Intensive field experience in isolated rural schools should be provided by teacher education programs. Funding must be provided to disseminate information to rural communities. (NEC)

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RURAL MINORITY EDUCATION AND THE "RURAL EDUCATION MOVEMENT"

Where Do They Stand?

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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The degree to which rural education has come into its own is indicated by the number of sessions on the topic at AERA this week as well as by other events on the national scene. President Carter announced a Small Community and Rural Development Policy in December, and in January followed up with a Youth Initiative that specified rural as well as urban growth as a topic of concern. An Interagency Working Group on Small Community and Rural Development, co-chaired by Jack Watson and Alex Mercure, has been constituted. And even though the Department of Education has not yet been legally established, there is now in existence a Task Force on Rural Education, which will be headed by Bill Fischer, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Budget, when the Department becomes official. The National Institute of Education is conducting some intensive studies of rural vocational education as part of a Congressionally-mandated study. Finally, the latest decennial report published by the House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education contains two invited articles on rural education.[1] At least at the national level, then, it appears that rural education has become visible. Unfortunately, this long-desired acknowledgement came just before a time of severe retrenchments in federal spending and a set of alarming economic developments.

The bad news notwithstanding, the fact of recognition for rural education is important and salutory. It is perhaps

only in the context of that having happened that we may begin to stand back and assess where we -- the people in the new rural education "movement" -- have been, are, and need to go with respect to rural minority concerns.

What I would like to do then - having understood that this session allows flexibility and that the Chair is willing to let me stretch that definition to its limits - is use this time as an opportunity to come out of the closet with some questions, ideas, and worries that -- I know -- have been on some of our minds for a long time. In this discussion, I will refer rather freely to a recent paper I wrote on the need for minority education and work linkages. At the end, I would like to suggest some needed actions and changes by a few groups and agencies that I believe are in the best position to take and make them, respectively.

My general remarks will refer to minority people of all ages. The age group in which I am especially interested, however, and the target population for most of this discussion, is the one whose members range in age from about 15 to about 25 - give or take a few years. That rural minority youth in this country may be in some danger of becoming invisible -- in spite of attention being directed generally to rural education -- is indicated by at least a couple of things.

On is that, for all the good things accomplished by Vice-President Mondale's Task Force on Youth Unemployment, including the Youth Initiative which resulted from its work, the rural youth's plight has received less than an adequate

emphasis. One can only hope that influence will be used in appropriate places to assure that, if and when the chopping time comes, the rural sector doesn't end up being the first row to get ~~chopped.~~ laid down. This legislation may be the most beneficial one for rural minority youth in a long, long time; it must not be allowed to pass by some of the nation's neediest populations.

A second indication is that rural minority educators and education researchers - and that has tended to mean the research itself - are not yet nearly as visible as they should be in the so-called "rural education movement." For example, in a meeting last fall with a high-level federal official (who happens to be black and urban) I was disappointed but by no means shocked to hear him say that whenever he thought of rural, he imagined the large flat farmlands of the Midwest. The nation, I believe, has a tendency to conceive of rural life in limited ways. I will return to this point later.

If we think for a moment about the best-known rural education groups and associations, the problem becomes painfully obvious. Our own SIG group is one. How many people belonging to it have minority education as a major research interest? The Rural Regional Education Association (RREA) has few minority members, (I saw no blacks at the Hyannis meeting two years ago). People United for Rural Education (PURE) still has, to the best of my knowledge, an entirely white membership. That is not by design or intent, for the vast majority of rural Iowans are white; it is merely another indicaiton of the fact the most disadvantaged groups - who most need an organized voice -

are probably least able of all groups to be strong advocates for their cause. Communicating for Agriculture, a group with an education component in its program of activities, is another white group. The Washington-based OCRE group, whose meetings I attend regularly and of which I am a charter member, had no regular attendees who belonged to any minority group during its first year. The organizations represented there simply had no minority people in rural education roles that permitted the exercise of leadership and initiative. I feel confident that in none of these cases was there a desire not to have a minorities' education agenda. I do believe, however, that not having one is a reflection of the way things began, and that the time has come to begin building such an agenda.

RURAL YOUTH UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE IN THE UNITED STATES BY REGION AND RACE OR ETHNIC GROUPS, 1970.[1/]

NUMERIC DISTRIBUTION AND PROPORTIONS AMONG GROUPS

		Race or Ethnic Group			
	Total	White	Black	Spanish Heritage	Native American
North Central	7,400,329 (100.00)	7,287,110 (98.47)	63,237 (0.85)	57,314 (0.77)	43,683 (0.59)
North East	4,394,545 (100.00)	4,314,846 (98.18)	17,698 (0.40)	66,263 (1.50)	6,353 (0.14)
South	10,419,202 (100.00)	8,114,718 (77.88)	2,237,518 (21.47)	256,415 (2.46)	59,301 (0.56)
West	2,799,872 (100.00)	2,546,675 (90.95)	28,242 (1.00)	347,809 (12.42)	145,076 (5.18)
Total	25,013,948 (100.00)	22,263,349 (89.00)	2,346,695 (9.38)	727,801 (2.90)	254,413 (1.01)

Percentages are shown in parentheses. 1/ This table was taken from a recent publication by Luis Jimenez (1973, p. 12).

The population called rural minority youth is larger than many people think but small enough to face the danger of seeming invisible at the national level - particularly on those occasions when minorities are not there. Yet in some places rural minority populations are very substantial. In 1969 the South's rural youth population was more than twenty-one percent black, and the West's young Hispanic population was about twelve-and-a-half percent. Indian youth were about 5% of the total in the West.

Another population that might be looked at as a minority group is the Appalachian one, particularly in central Appalachia, where 70% of the people are rural; where educational attainment and achievement are chronic problems; where the per-capita income is only 70% of the national average; and where the land and people have been "exploited and brutalized." Appalachia, in addition, is plagued by underemployment and probably by a serious undercount of the unemployed.[2]

Without going into the details of research on rural minority populations conducted by such people as Kuvlesky, Cosby and Fratoe[3] - all sociologists, incidentally - let me proceed on the assumption that we agree on the more severe educational and economic plight of rural minorities, relative to other rural groups as a whole. My concern is not with a lack of a general understanding but rather with two other things. Our lack of specific and detailed knowledge of minority conditions and potential opportunities at regional, sub-regional, state, and community levels is regrettable

because it inhibits the development of sound programs and policies for the redress of educational and other social ills. But perhaps of more importance for this session is the question of what we - we rural educators - intend to do as a consequence of our general knowledge that rural minorities are among the poorest, least educated people in the nation and tend many times to live where a collective voice raised on behalf of rural development is rarely heard above a whisper.

Although we are educators, we do not cling to an illusion that educational effort alone will improve education for minority communities - surely most of us do not do this. If we take a position - which some of us do take - that education improvement is likely to occur only if it is part of a comprehensive effort to redress existing inequities in minority communities rural development, what are the implications of this rural development perspective? Specifically, what are the implications for research and policy?

First an essential acknowledgment must be made. Second, an error of perception - or image, if you will - must be recognized and corrected.

It is unlikely that rural teachers and other educators will ever see the improvements they would like to see unless rural students are provided with greater job opportunities. So let us begin by acknowledging that the most significant problem in most rural minority communities is not education directly, but jobs. I do not hear anyone claiming, in fact, that a 100% school completion rate and a 100% mastery of

essential skills would end the youth unemployment problem. While it is true that employers place a priority on basic skill mastery and good work habits, it does not follow that adequate numbers of jobs would materialize if all students were magically to acquire those attributes employers want by next week, next month, or next year. The minority youth's difficulties in funding decent work have, if anything, grown more severe during the past several years, although in most cases education allocations has increased.

Population shifts and demographic change, along with an economic slowdown, have resulted in a situation of economic depression for some rural communities. It is true that there are growth pockets for some rural people. Rural minorities, however, are very often concentrated in places where no such benefits have accrued, or where if they have, they have failed to benefit the indigenous populations.

There is another problem with which minority youth must contend in the job market:

> As numerous educators have observed, public education became the frontier for escape in the twentieth century, providing, theoretically, a way for the talented and enterprising to work their way upward into prestigious and interesting jobs. Education can no longer provide that escape, for there are not enough prestigious and interesting jobs to go around. For young people, there are not enough jobs - period. Evidence from the past decade indicates that privileged youth have become increasingly aggressive in their competition for prestigious job slots and that there is less and less room for underprivileged students to compete at all. The cycle feeds on itself. As opportunities for disadvantaged youth shrink, there are less apparent reasons for them to work hard and do well in school. Their educational performance, in turn, becomes an "explanatory" variable that social scientists use in analyzing the youth crisis. I would like to advance the thought that dis-

advantaged young people who drop out of school or do poorly may not be behaving irrationally, given the reality of options currently available.

We, therefore, require, I suggest, social policies that will enable rural communities to provide more options for youth. In a decent society, the burden of providing opportunities should fall on makers of social policy, rather than on disadvantaged young people. Since the world has taken on a technological character and as wealth has become more concentrated within fewer large institutions during this century, policies would be naive indeed were they to imply that disadvantaged individuals have the option of striking out, alone and independent, to prove their worth. Now only the cities have homesteads -- in limited numbers.[4]

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Many of us have acquired from the history we were taught a series of nostalgic images of early rural America, images that often have a basis on fact as well as fantasy. One image grounded in some reality is the New England green with its church, school, and courthouse, for on this model New England and Mid-Atlantic settlements were fashioned in the early days of the Republic. Inheriting elements of the theocratic state from Puritans, Baptists, and Quakers who conceived of the world as a God-centered place, New England and later Old Northwest communities gave prominence to the church in their village designs. A common, or elementary, school was often established nearby so that students could learn to spell, cipher, declaim, do rudimentary mathematics, and gain moral instruction. The courthouse was the seat of arbitration in the community where disputes among neighbors and kin could be settled legally, of not always amicably or peaceably. And surrounding the green were shops, hostelries, and smithies, while beyond it lay farms, orchards, forests, and pastures where family members of all ages carried on the productive activities that gave them a living. That image is part reality and part embroidery. Two things about the description should not mislead us. The first is that although it sounds pastoral in description, the life was not easy affording much leisure or physical comfort, though it doubtless had the greatly compensating comfort of coherence. The second fact is that it was not then -- as is now -- everyone's kind of rural experience or rural

> heritage. Life in the rural south has rarely been rural village life, nor did rural Mexican-Americans or rural American Indians center their communal life in a village green with a white steepled church.

If we are to be serious about minority educational improvement through developmental efforts that include job creation in rural communities, we must take on the problem of the prevailing image. It is, of course, a truism that development efforts initiated solely by outsiders rarely - if ever - endure when the funds have all been spent. Obviously, rural communities need to develop the capacity to generate and develop local education improvement and job creation efforts. They need to learn the kind of grantsmanship and savvy that successful fund raisers have acquired. They cannot do these things alone and unaided; but at least they must be put into positions where they can initiate actions.

There is a problem, however.

> Rural people lacking access to satisfactory jobs and necessary services must work against the backdrop of two unfounded - and antithetical -- impressions. One that seems to dominate current rural enthusiasts on the Washington scene is that rural people are typically either big farmers (the amber waves of grain image) or village folk (the "sweet Auburn, loveliest village on the plain" image). The other, perpetuated by mass-audience television shows like Green Acres, The Beverly Hillbillies, and Hee Haw, is that the typical rural person is a hick, clown, or bumpkin. In the first instance, nostalgia is likely to inform suggested rural policies. In the second instance, a do-gooder spirit of "uplift" laced with a strong measure of condescension will influence proposed "reform" policies. In both cases, policies are likely to exacerbate the very conditions that inhibit rural development, and the person who happens to reside in the country but who lives in the late twentieth century goes unaccommodated.[6]

When I mentioned the New England village with its church, school, and courthouse, I was referring to a failure of understanding which may seriously undermine rural improvement efforts. That so many newcomers to rural areas - as well, I suggest, as the new breed of rural enthusiasts in Washington, DC - have attached themselves to that particular image suggests a problem we need to address. In part it is a problem of nostalgia, which is dangerous when allowed to influence social policies affecting human lives now and in the future.

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I would like to conclude this paper with suggestions for two groups. The first group is ourselves - rural educators and rural education researchers.

First, as researchers who recognize that already serious economic problems are likely to grow worse in the coming decade and that minority communities will bear a disproportionate share of the suffering unless preventive provisions are made, we can begin addressing this topic through the research studies and policy analyses we undertake. In particular, we need to undertake research on potential ways of linking education and development and on alternative ways of providing services and upgrading staff instruction in communities that are weak in those areas.

Third, we should consider how we might be more aggressive in encouraging minority participation in the Rural Education SIG. All of us should use the locations of other meetings and

conferences to make this point. We might want to consider a special focus on rural minorities in our call for papers this summer.

These things are necessary but far from sufficient conditions for improvement. Thus the more wide-ranging agenda is one that must be taken up and advocated by local communities and by state and federal policymakers. Several actions and changes are necessary.

> At a minimum, we need national policies that take into account a few special rural conditions: an undifferentiated economic structure, a limited number of institutions, a small or sparse population, and the fact of rural isolation. State and federal programs should, wherever necessary, be revised to allow rural institutions to operate in a rural manner -- serving multiple purposes rather than one specialized one. Formula grants based on number rather than proportion of poor students should be revised because they discriminate against small or sparsely-settled rural places. And eligibility criteria should be expanded in many instances to allow community-based organizations to receive educational grant monies.
>
> Second, incentives should be provided to encourage rural private-public sector collaboration. These incentives should discourage self-serving actions by special-interest groups. Without these incentives, we should not expect to see much voluntary cooperation in a time of retrenchment, inflation, and recession. Again, attention to eligibility criteria in education grants and awards should be examined and altered where necessary to accommodate appropriate institutions.
>
> Third, state universities and teacher training institutions in states with substantial rural populations should follow the lead of institutions like Brigham Young University, which several years ago began a Rural Teacher Education Program. The program includes a

required, intensive field experience in an isolated rural school early in the prospective teacher's program. It simply is not fair to either teachers or young people to prepare teachers for work only in metropolitan schools. A teacher's life and work are different in the small town or countryside. Rural teacher trainers have found that lack of proper preparation can result in a devastating inability to cope with the demands of the rural situation, a devastation which is frequently passed on to students in the form of inappropriate instruction. Specific rural teacher preparation is not merely desirable; it is essential.

Fourth, funds must be provided for dissemination and sharing of information, and appropriate organizations must take the lead in establishing and expanding rural networks. The federal government should identify and fund appropriate rural organizations to undertake appropriate kinds of dissemination. Since a good pedagogical principal is that people learn most from those with whom they identify, rural communities need to know what other communities "like themselves" have been doing. They need to be "linked up."

NOTES

1. The articles are by Gail A. Parks and Jonathan P.Sher. See U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Subcommittee on Elementary Secondary, and Vocational Education. Committee on Education and Labor. Needs of Elementary and Secondary Education in the 1980's: A Compendium of Policy Papers. Ninety-Sixth Congress, second session, January 1980. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980. 693 p.

2. Michael Wenger. The Employment of Disadvantaged Youth in Appalachia. Minority Youth Symposium Paper, Edinburg, Texas. March 1980.

3. Arthur G. Cosby and William Kuvleski are rural sociologists at Texas A & M University. Both have written extensively on black and Spanish-heritage youth. Frank A. Fratoe is a sociologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture who is doing a series of research reports on minorities and education.

4. Gail A. Parks. Linking Education and Work in Rural Places: Toward a Concept for the 1980s. Minority Youth Symposium Paper, Edinburg, Texas. March 1980.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.